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ORMOLU IN THE HOENTSCHEL COLLECTION



IN many of the Persian and Indian arts, burnished gold has had an important place for a much longer time than it has had in the European crafts; in fact, the incentive to the use of gilding in manuscripts, leather book covers, boxes, etc., on porcelain, glass, metal work and even in early paintings may very well have been derived from the study of objects brought from the near Orient by the Venetian traders. Its application to leather book covers began, we know, in the sixteenth century as a direct result of such traffic, although the Scribes had used their secret processes in producing gilded initials and borders in their Psalters and Books of Hours long before that time.

The gilding of the baser metals began practically at the end of the seventeenth century in answer to the demand for such

ornamentation in connection with the furniture created by Boule, the versatile craftsman, who may be said to have invented the style that bears his name and to have initiated the styles of the period. From Henry Havard's *Dictionnaire de l'ameublement*, we learn that the first mention of gilded metal, or *or moulu* (gilded ground gold) occurs in the *Entrée solennelle de Henri II et Catherine de Medicis à Rouen* (1551), reading as follows:

"Trois des éléphantz portoient sur la bastine de grandz vases de bronze recouvertz d'or moullu, pour mieux monstrer (imiter) l'antique oerain de Corinthe."

There are several methods of gilding metals, but the one in general use in the eighteenth century, which, as we have said, was the heyday of this kind of work, was the one described under the expression *or moulu*. It consisted of applying an amalgam of powdered gold and mercury to the object and then heating it until the mercury became volatilized, when it was polished. This method, owing to the fumes arising from the quicksilver, was fraught with danger to the workmen, and so early claimed the attention of the Academy in an effort to overcome its evils.

As a glance at the products of this art would show, it was in its origin an outgrowth of the art of the goldsmith; indeed, until the fifteenth century the makers of ornaments of gilded metals were included in the guild of the *orfèvres*. When the company of gilders established its own rules and chose its patron saint is not, however, known; but it is certain, so Havard tells us, that they had their autonomy in the seventeenth century. At the end of the eighteenth century the community occupied two streets, the rue Dauphin and the



CLOCK ORNAMENTS OF ORMOLU

rue de la Verrerie, and numbered, in 1788, some sixty-one members. The masters of the craft are known by name and in some cases their work may be identified.

During the eighteenth century the *Doreur d'or moulu* produced the metal work

commodes, and other pieces of household furniture.

These small pieces of decoration reflect with astonishing vividness the many gradations and shades of styles that entered into that most decorative of epochs, the



WORKSHOP OF A GILDER OF METALS

which in great profusion entered into the embellishment of all kinds of *meubles* for the home as well as the church—crosses, candlesticks, basins, lamps, censers, cruetes, candelabra, clocks, snuffers, and the many different kinds of ornament, squares, panels, bands, consoles, scutcheons, and the leg ends used on bureaux, armoires,

French eighteenth century. A large collection, embracing many important pieces, was received by the Museum with the Hoentschel Collection, presented by Mr. J. Pierpont Morgan, in 1907, and a part of it has now been placed on exhibition. The illustrations which accompany this note show their general character.

